

Lawmakers Deny Problems with Double Duty in Energy Policy

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During a legislative committee hearing today, it became clear that nuclear power generation in Utah is not a question of if but when.

The state is looking at cleaner burning energy sources and some argue nuclear energy is one clear source, but during today's hearing the topic turned to who is backing nuclear power in the state.

It was standing room only at the conference hearing this morning as legislators peppered various energy related speakers with questions on efficiency, alternative projects and climate change. Then the topic turned to nuclear power and something interesting happened.



When Republican Michael Noel said, "Go ahead and take the stand," he wasn't only talking to the next to testify. Noel, the House chairman of the Public Utilities and Technology Interim Committee was also talking to a colleague.

Republican Rep. Aaron Tilton took the stand to testify before his committee not as a legislator, but as a businessman. "We want to talk about what we're doing here. What we're looking at Utah for," Tilton said.

Tilton and his partner, the former head of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, are looking at Utah to build nuclear power plants. Some question Tilton's motive since he sits on the committee that would vote on the future of nuclear power in the state. "Oh my word: conflict of interest. These guys have a lot of nerve," Utah resident Jim O'Neal said.

Tilton dismissed the criticism surrounding his position. "Those items and stories are interesting to read, and they sell newspapers, but they're not unexpected," he said.

He then used an analogy to explain. "Just as a teacher sits on appropriations board for the Education Subcommittee or appropriates money for their school districts," he said.



House Speaker and Republican Greg Curtis says having Tilton testify is not unusual. "Well, no, that's not necessarily unusual when you're doing on behalf, depending on legislation of the bill. I used to serve on the Judiciary Committee. I'm an attorney by profession. When I ran the bills dealing with domestic violence I'd be on the committee. When it was time to present that bill to committee members would go over and present that bill.

However, when KSL News reminded Curtis that he didn't have a financial interest in domestic violence and that Tilton was testifying on behalf of his company, Curtis said, "OK, that brings a unique level to it."

There are also questions surrounding the chair of the committee that held hearings today, Rep. Michael Noel. He is executive director of the Kane County Water Conservancy District.

Noel just recently sold water rights to Tilton's company for use in a nuclear facility. That water district stands to make \$70 million dollars off of that transaction, but Noel says he doesn't have a conflict of interest because he won't see any of that money.

Heal Utah and the Sierra Club say the two representatives have no business shaping Utah's energy policy when they have ties to a nuclear power plant.